



# HOLIDAYS IN THE UNITED STATES

## An Overview of U.S. Holidays

### Federal Holidays

The United States, like other nations, sets aside a number of days each year to commemorate events, people or public occasions. These holidays typically are marked by a general suspension of work and business activity, and by public and/or religious ceremonies. Technically, the United States does not celebrate national holidays, but Congress has designated 10 "legal public holidays," during which most federal institutions are closed and most federal employees are excused from work. Although the individual states and private businesses are not required to observe these, in practice all states, and nearly all employers, observe the majority of them.

### Other Celebrations

Beside the Federal holidays, Americans celebrate a variety of national observances throughout the year. Various ethnic and religious groups in America celebrate days with special meaning to them even though these are not national holidays. Jews, for example, observe their high holy days in September, Muslims celebrate Ramadan, African Americans cele-

brate Kwanzaa, Irish Americans celebrate the old country's patron saint, St. Patrick, on March 17, and Mardi Gras is the day before the Christian season of Lent begins and is a big occasion in New Orleans, Louisiana, where huge parades and wild revels take place. There are many other such religious and ethnic celebrations in the United States.

While not holidays, two other days of the year inspire colorful celebrations in the United States are on February 14, Valentine's Day and October 31, Halloween.

There are also celebrations addressing four recognition months that are commonly acknowledged in the USA: Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, and Hispanic Heritage Month.

It should be noted that, with the many levels of American government, confusion can arise as to what public and private facilities are open on a given holiday. The daily newspaper is a good source of general information, but visitors who are in doubt should call for information ahead of time.

### Related links:

- Celebrate! Holidays in the U.S.A.  
<http://goo.gl/6spnB>
- Facts for Features & Special Editions from Census.gov  
<http://goo.gl/sz8op>
- Federal Holidays: Operating Status and Schedule  
<http://goo.gl/VWwsnv>
- Holidays: National Celebrations  
<http://goo.gl/RNFIP>

(Compiled from the IIP Digital and InfoUSA.state.gov)



Each year a theme is selected for Christmas at the White House, a tradition started by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy in 1961. Theme for 2011 holiday season is "Shine, Give, Share." The White House official tour features 37 Christmas trees, a gingerbread model of the White House, and 5 different representations of First Dog Bo Obama. For details please visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/holidays>

### Related link:

- The Holiday Season at the White House  
<http://goo.gl/Qi6CH>

### U.S. Embassy Jakarta Mission Statement

Based on mutual respect and shared values, the U.S. Mission works with Indonesia to strengthen democracy, sustain the environment, promote prosperity, enhance understanding and ensure security for our people, our nations, and our region.

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## Federal Holidays

These are 10 “legal public holidays” designed by Congress. Since 1971, a number of these holidays have been fixed on Mondays rather than on a particular calendar date so as to afford workers a long holiday weekend.

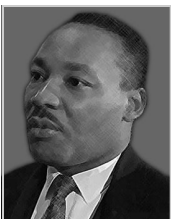
### New Year's Day

January 1st

In America, the celebration of this holiday begins the night before, when Americans gather to wish each other a happy and prosperous coming year. Many Americans make New Year's resolutions. Read more on the New Year's Day at <http://goo.gl/DlxOQ>. Get some ideas on the New Year's resolutions at <http://goo.gl/5tcE9>

### Martin Luther King Day

Third Monday in January

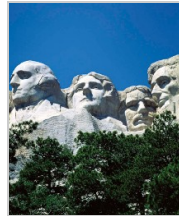


Martin Luther King, Jr. was an African-American clergyman who is recognized for his tireless

efforts to win civil rights for all people through nonviolent means. On November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation establishing a legal holiday honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. The federal holiday was first observed in 1986 and in 1999 all states observed the holiday. Read more at <http://goo.gl/izdMp>

### Presidents' Day

Third Monday in February



This holiday is formally called Washington's Birthday to honor George Washington, the first Presi-

dent of the United States. Many Americans used the holiday to celebrate the full legacy of American Presidents. To celebrate the holiday each year, the U.S. Senate chooses one of its members to read George Washington's Farewell Address in legislative session. Explore more at <http://goo.gl/yfsxT> and <http://goo.gl/5c9AA>

### Memorial Day

Fourth Monday in May

Memorial Day, originally called Decoration Day, honors the American men and women who have died in wars or in the service of their country. To pay tribute to them, Americans are encouraged to observe a minute of silence at 3.00 PM local time. Read more on Memorial Day at <http://goo.gl/yfruU>

### Independence Day

July 4th



On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence,

officially breaking bonds with England and forming a new

independent nation, the United States of America. In the words of Founding Father John Adams, the holiday would be “the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance. ... It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forever more.”

Read more on Independence Day at <http://goo.gl/VUQvN> and <http://goo.gl/5OT3b>

Related link:

IRC Info-pack “Independence Day & Democracy” is available at <http://goo.gl/9oNa8>

### Labor Day

The first Monday in September

Labor Day was established as a holiday for workers, both as a tribute to their contributions to the nation, and as a means of bringing more public awareness to their struggles. Read more at <http://goo.gl/rcEsP>

### Columbus Day

Second Monday in October

This holiday commemorates the first voyage of Christopher Columbus, who sailed west from Spain in 1492 and reached the islands of present day Bahamas. Read more at <http://goo.gl/XvyWp>

### Thanksgiving

Fourth Thursday in November

In the U.S., Thanksgiving is a time for tradition and sharing.



People gather with family and friends to enjoy a traditional meal and to give thanks for life's many blessings. Even if family members live far apart they will try to come together for a family reunion at Thanksgiving.

Read more at <http://goo.gl/BfDhw>

### Veterans Day

November 11

Veteran Day is a day to honor military Veterans in wartime or peacetime. It is celebrated with parades, ceremonies and tributes to veterans in small towns and large cities throughout the country. The national ceremony itself is held at Arlington National Cemetery. Read more at <http://www.va.gov/opa/vetsday/>

### Christmas

December 25



Christmas, celebrated by most Christians to commemorate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

Today, most Americans blend religious and secular customs with their own family traditions, often incorporating food, decorations and rituals from places they or their ancestors once called home. Read more at <http://goo.gl/0WXko>

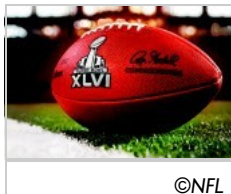
## Other Celebrations

In addition to the ten federal holidays, there are celebratory days that are commonly recognized in schools and communities in the United States.

There are also recognition months which dedicated to a particular cause, movement, or issue. For federally-recognized months, the President of the United States will make a public proclamation, citing the month and calling upon Americans to commemorate that month with appropriate programs and activities. Some of those days are follows:

### Celebratory Days

#### Super Bowl Sunday



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Each year, on a Sunday at the end of Janu-

ary or beginning of February, millions of Americans declare their own unofficial holiday, to participate vicariously in a televised spectacle that has far outgrown its origins as a sporting event, Super Bowl. The Super Bowl, which determines the championship of American football, is most of all a shared experience. In a nation where the individual so often does his or her "own thing," Americans disproportionately choose to spend this day in the company of friends. Read more at <http://goo.gl/PIAlz>

#### Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day, celebrated on February 14, is traditionally a day in which people express their love and care to one another by presenting gifts, such as candy, flowers, and other symbols of love or affection. Read more at: <http://goo.gl/8nkjA>

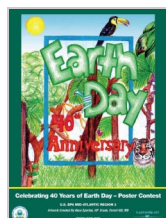
#### St. Patrick's Day

Originally a religious holiday to honor St. Patrick, who introduced Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century, St. Patrick's Day has evolved into a celebration for all things Irish. In America. The world's first St. Patrick's Day parade occurred on March 17, 1762, in New York City, featuring Irish soldiers serving in the English military. This parade became an annual event, Congress proclaimed March as Irish-American Heritage Month in 1995, and the President issues a proclamation commemorating the occasion each year.

Source: <http://goo.gl/6tN86>

Related link: <http://goo.gl/Uyn8V>

#### Earth Day



Earth Day, celebrated annually on April 22, is the U.S. event on the environment to remind Americans to protect the natural gifts of planet Earth. More info on Earth Day is

available at <http://www.epa.gov/earthday/>

Related link:

IRC Info-pack on Earth Day 2011 is available at <http://goo.gl/GU2bC>

#### Mother's Day and Father's Day

Mother's day is celebrated on the second Sunday in May and Father's Day is recognized on the third Sunday in June. On these days, American show their appreciation by giving their mothers, fathers, or those who have served as parental figure. More story is available at <http://goo.gl/hISrg>

#### Halloween



Halloween is one of the oldest holidays still observed in

the Western world. Once the most important day of the year for the ancient Celtic peoples, Samhain was believed to be a time when the souls of the dead were set free for one night to roam the earth. With the spread of Christianity, the souls of saints and all the dead were remembered on November 1 and 2. October 31 became known as "All Hallows' Eve," from which "Halloween" is derived. Popular Halloween traditions in the United States include trick-or-treat costumes and decorations for greeting

cards and windows. Read more at <http://goo.gl/nfVH>

### Recognition Months

#### African-American History Month

To commemorate and celebrate the contributions to American nation made by people of African descent, American historian Carter G. Woodson established Black History Week. The first celebration occurred on Feb. 12, 1926. Each year, U.S. presidents proclaim February as National African-American History Month. Read more at <http://goo.gl/g7Si7>

Related link:

IRC Info-pack on African American History Month 2011 is available at <http://goo.gl/J5qww>

#### Women's History Month



Women's History Month is celebrated in March to recognize women's achievements in diverse areas and honor their role in shaping the society. Americans commemorate it with special program and activities in schools, work places as well as communities. Find more information at <http://goo.gl/gZ4BQ>

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## IRC Collections

### BOOKS

**Chase's Calendar of Events 2010: The Ultimate Go-to Guide for Special Days, Weeks and Months/Chase's** (Corporate Author). McGraw-Hill (October 2009). ISBN-13: 978-0071627412

It is the authoritative guide to special occurrences, holidays, anniversaries, celebrity birthdates, religious observances, sporting events, and more from around the world.

**Encyclopedia of American Holidays and National Days (2 volumes)/Len** Travers (Author). Greenwood (April 30, 2006). ISBN-13: 978-0313331305

This two-volumes reference describes the history and customs surrounding significant

civic and religious holidays celebrated in the U.S., emphasizing depth of coverage over breadth.

**For More IRC Books Collection Check Our Catalog at:**

<http://69.63.217.22/>

[UI0086Staff/OPAC/index.asp](http://69.63.217.22/UI0086Staff/OPAC/index.asp)



Are you looking for articles on celebrations in the U.S. related topics and/or other subjects? Now available, eLibraryUSA, with around 30 databases of authoritative and continually updated information.

To get details on access to this database, contact the IRC at:

**Email:** [ircjakarta@state.gov](mailto:ircjakarta@state.gov)  
**Phone:** 021-350-8467

## Other Celebrations *Continued from page 3*

### Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

It is celebrated in May with community events that involve historical, educational, and cultural activities, and the recognition of famous Asian Americans in such fields as economics, politics, science, and culture. Read more at <http://goo.gl/1zwXX>

### Hispanic Heritage Month

Each year, Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15, by celebrating the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. Find more information at <http://goo.gl/vml4R>

Related link:

IRC Info-pack "American Diversity: Hispanic Heritage Month," is available at <http://goo.gl/3YzcF>

### American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month

Each November, American honors the cultural traditions, contributions and history of America's indigenous peoples in honor of their many sacrifices and contributions to our nation's well-being. Read more at <http://goo.gl/YxAxj>

Related link:

Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month: November 2011, is available at <http://goo.gl/Tobhv>

### About the Information Resource Center

The U.S. Embassy's Information Resource Center (IRC) in Jakarta is a specialized reference and research facility whose goal is to provide you with accurate, up-to-date and authoritative information about U.S. society and policy materials, covering such topics as U.S. foreign policy, government, economics and trade, history, social and cultural issues. Three professionally-trained reference specialists will help you to retrieve needed-information quickly, conveniently, and free of charge.

The IRC collection includes a reference collection, a periodicals section, and access to extensive online commercial-databases.

For details on reference and periodical collections, please check our online catalog at <http://69.63.217.22/UI0086Staff/OPAC/index.asp>.

For all IRC information products, including this info package are available online at: <http://jakarta.usembassy.gov/infoproduct.html>

Information queries may be submitted to us by phone, fax, mail, and e-mail. You are also welcome to visit us by appointment for personal research assistance.

### Contact Info:

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Walk-in Visitors

(by appointment only):

Monday to Friday; from 07:30 to 16:00  
Closed on U.S. and Indonesian holidays

*Disclaimer: Books, articles and websites described in this info package present a diversity of views in order to keep the IRC user abreast of current issues in the United States in particular and worldwide in general. These items represented the views and opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official U.S. Government policy.*